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THE CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCH*

THE RT. REV. WILLIAM LAWRENCE, D.D.,
Bishop of Massachusetts

When the General Convention of 1880, meeting in New York City, was about to dissolve, the Bishops, at the request of the House of Deputies, sent forth to the Church a message of which this paragraph was the dominant note: "We should endeavor to throw ourselves into the actual breathing world around us, and speak to the living present, rather than to the dead past. We should seek to know the needs of our country, the tendencies, dangers, exigencies of our times, to what God calls us in His Providence, what traces of His guidance and direction we can discern in past history, and whither He points us now. What, then, is our position?"

Under the conditions of this nation with the separation of church and state, where does this church stand in the subject of education? We believe that education includes the whole child, youth, and man: that it involves his physical, intellectual, moral, and spiritual nature. We believe in education in its largest, richest significance. What the boy learns in school is of great importance, but it is only a part of his education: lessons, influences, forces pour into him from every quarter. We believe that the source and spring of character which is the highest result of education is faith in God as revealed in Christ. Religion is at the foundation of education first, last, and always: it gives vitality, depth, and harmony to the whole character.

For such an education we believe that the American people of the twentieth century will stand.

But the question is asked from every quarter—how under our conditions of the separation of church and state, with children of all faiths and no faith in the public and many of the private schools, can there be religious education? Let us face that question frankly; for one sometimes fears that there are good people who are afraid to meet the issue.

We must keep this point clear. Real religious education can be only through the guidance, instruction, and leadership of religious men and women. The neglect of this truth has been the undoing of much so-called religious instruction. While, therefore, the State through her teachers may implant certain principles of

* Part of an address delivered at the last General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church.

morality, and may even teach the history of religion or the literature of religion, she cannot teach religion itself. So far as the teachers and scholars in our schools are religious and come from religious homes there will be an atmosphere of religion in the schoolroom. With, however, the variety of races, faiths, and no faiths represented in the children of our public schools, we may put the thought of definite teaching of the Christian faith in the schools out of our minds. It cannot be done and it ought not to be attempted.

May it not be possible for the different denominations to send religious teachers to the school-houses and at certain hours under a voluntary system give the children, separated according to sects, their religious education? The question may be raised as to whether the state has a right to give the use of its school-houses for denominational religious teaching. Is it well for children melted together in a common citizenship to be separated then and there into sectarian folds? Such an experiment, occasionally possible perhaps, cannot really meet the situation.

Shall we then turn our energies to the creation of parochial and other Church schools? We give high respect to those of the Roman Church, who, true to their convictions on this point, create church schools and pay for their administration in addition to their taxes for the public schools. And in our own and other Churches there are conditions where such schools are necessary and of great help. So long as the supporters of such schools do not import the outworn traditions of Europe and transgress the principles of this nation by asking for the support of their schools from public funds, they are doing a good though limited work for the country and their churches. Limited, however, that work must be in quality and quantity: in quality because children growing to manhood under one religious system and one roof must lack certain elements of thought and character essential to the largest citizenship; in quantity because these schools can supply only a fraction of the education of the millions of youth in this country.

The fact is that the great mass of children in this country are going to receive their general education in the public schools or in private schools where there can be but little or no definite religious instruction or leadership. We as a people believe in the schools; we are supporting them and our children as a whole are going to them. This fact having sunk deeply into our minds we again ask the question, how can there be religious education?

The children must get their definite religious education else-

where than in the schools. Why not? Why should we cling to the fetish that religion must be taught under the same roof or in the same room with geography and arithmetic? Is not this common notion due largely to the fact that in other days children used to be so taught and that we are afraid we cannot get them taught at any other time or by other teachers? Just here is the weak point in our present frame of mind. We have not fully grasped the situation nor directed our thought and action along the path that must be taken.

If this country is to remain Christian, the people of the country must be shown how they can support our great and noble school system and at the same time bring up their children in the principles of Christian faith and character.

Turn your thoughts for a moment from children in the mass to one typical American child.

He is born of Christian parents; is baptized; is taught to pray, and is given the first principles of the Christ child life; in Sunday-school his teacher, alert, sympathetic, intelligent, so correlates his religious instruction with the studies of his day-school, with his social, athletic and thoughtful interests, that the spiritual culture enters into the very texture of his thought and character. At home, in the day-school, on the playground, at church, on the street, religion is as natural and real as any other interest of his life because of the influences and atmosphere about him.

The youth is followed up into his high school or commercial activities by those who have a virile, intelligent and vital grasp of the faith, sympathetic with the turmoils of his doubts and passions. Can you doubt that when that boy enters manhood he will have gained such integrity of faith and character as no artificial or hot-house system could have offered him?

"True," is the answer; but this demands of parents, teachers and church more than we can hope or ask for. There is not the devotion, time or ability to do this. If there were, the ideal is right.

Just here we strike the root of the difficulty—timidity, indifference, laziness, or lack of faith. This, then, is what I want to say with all the conviction at my command, that it is along this path that the church must move. The church of this day and country, recognizing the conditions of the day and country, must marshal to her service every instrumentality at hand—parents and the home, the press and literature, the playground, an hour of a weekday or Sunday, various forms of schools, correspondence, public worship, the pastoral work, the Parish, the Diocese, the Department—every-

thing; and, in a large and statesmanlike way, plan for and press through not one system, but many systems, of religious education, yes, and spiritual culture, without apparent system, that will reach and upbuild all sorts and conditions of children in Christian faith and character.

Look where you will, there is no other course practical and consistent. It is along the natural habits of life; it is spiritual; it is free; it creates strength as it goes; it knits youth and maturity together in a consistent development; it creates such toughness of moral and spiritual fibre as may stand the strain of later years. And, what is often the test of truth, it makes the heaviest demand upon the whole church, every member of it, for thought, enterprise and devotion.

NEW SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

A PROPOSED NEW COURSE IN RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

WILLIAM I. LAWRENCE.

Secretary Department of Religious Education, Am. Unitarian Assoc., Boston

The attention of the Department of Religious Education of the American Unitarian Association has been centered, for more than a year, upon a proposed new course of religious instruction. It is intended that this course shall be set forth in a series of books covering the needs of pupils between the ages of four and twenty-one, providing books for classes, for teachers, and for home work. A preliminary announcement is given herewith.

Why does it seem to us necessary to provide a new series of textbooks in religious education? Because knowledge grows, and nowhere faster than in the realm of educational method. Striking as this advance is in all educational science, it is, perhaps, most pronounced in the field of education in religion and morals. For here we have not only progress in the science of teaching, based upon growing knowledge of how to deal with developing mental powers, we have, in peculiar fulness, the gain that has been made in knowledge of developing traits, tastes, moral capacities and propensities, in what is known, that is, as child psychology. The special problem in religious education is that of meeting the developing characters of young people at each stage with such moral or spiritual stimuli as shall help them to take the next step forward.